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DAYS
ON THE
NEPIGON

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DAYS ON THE NEPIGON.



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UPPER CAMERON RAPIDS.

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DAYS ON THE NEPIGON

E. E. M.



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FOSTER & REYNOLDS COMPANY
NEW YORK
1917

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BY E. E. MILLARD.

THESE RECOLLECTIONS OF DAYS ON
THE NEPIGON ARE DEDICATED TO THE
MEMORY OF MY ANGLING COMPANION,
W. FRED. ALLEN.

E. E. M.

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DAYS ON THE NEPIGON.

I.

BEFORE starting up the river, we will relate an incident and register a promise. The first thing attracting our attention after leaving the railway station at Nepigon village was a string of speckled trout basking in the sun and dirt on the porch of the tavern opposite. There were eight, the largest one weighing possibly a pound and a half. Presently a tall, rather distinguished looking gentleman came forward, and with a pocket-scale weighed the largest one. We caught a glimpse of the graduate on the scale; it registered one and a half pounds, including dirt. "Well," said the rather distinguished looking gentleman, "he's a two-pounder, all right." Without a word of disapproval from the defunct victim, and unconscious or indifferent to the fact that he was delivering his piscatorial misstatement

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within the hearing of a past-master in the art of falsification of finny records (but who had long since turned over a new leaf and repented), and despite the presumably veracious evidence of perfectly regulated scales, he could not resist the temptation of over-estimating.

We know not from whence the gentleman came, nor whither he went; but he had the appearance of a man who in commercial, professional or social life would be the very soul of probity, and would follow the line of truth, never swerving a hair's breadth. Yet in the recounting of an ordinary angling achievement he disclosed the oft recurring and almost irresistible temptation to exaggerate; and doubtless he has had that individual trout weighing, later in the season, at least three pounds; and his number correspondingly multiplied. Though, to give him the benefit of the doubt, he unconsciously fails to recall the facts correctly; and thousands of fish in the telling grow faster than Jonah's gourd. It was plainly evident that he was not the fin-

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ished sportsman, otherwise he would have taken better care of his catch.

He will doubtless expatiate upon his performance with unblushing mendacity, and cling to his inflated weights with barnacle tenacity. He personates the man who has looked too long upon the wine when it is red, and sees double. When counting or sizing fish, a respectable minority of our brotherhood inspect their catches with magnifying glasses, and their romances seem almost inspired, while their vision soars in spite of facts and figures, and one realizes that "absolute accuracy is the death of poetry, the prison of the imagination," and the arch enemy of small fish.

One cannot fail to applaud the excellent judgment of Munchausen in declining to enter the field of fishing stories; for well he knew the average angler was thoroughly competent to discount his most extravagant and improbable flights of fancy. I am reminded of Barney Whistler, one of the most notoriously truthful men that ever falsified. A friend

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asked him to substantiate a statement regarding some fishing excursion and its results. "Excuse me, please," says Barney, "you will have to swear to your own story, for I have all I can attend to remembering and managing my own; and I don't always succeed at that; for I have been smoked out more than once by seemingly innocent questions that set me to blushing and thinking." So, while from the angler's point of view, custom and habit and expectation warrant some deviation from the strict line of truth, this little record will be "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," "to the best of my knowledge and belief," so far as in me lies, not even excepting justifiable intervals.

We are very like Cassandra (I believe that was the name of the young lady of mythological times), who invariably spoke the truth, yet was never believed; so perhaps one, especially the angler, is sometimes partially justified in drawing the long bow. Truth seems so narrow a path, to a few of our genial fraternity, scarcely more than a poorly defined

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trail, little wonder we occasionally stub our toes; but these romances apply only to our angling achievements. Had Ananias confined himself to fishing yarns, he would never have suffered the penalty of immortality.

After all, it is an inoffensive fiction, and what signifies inaccuracy of weights and numbers and measurements among friends, when its prevalence is so thoroughly understood and acknowledged, and so harmless withal that it never reacts? It is usually anticipated and discounted, and then lying, if one is permitted to use so unpleasant a word, is so easy, simple and natural, that when an angling fib is entertainingly told, it is in a great measure forgivable. I am not on speaking terms with any other style of exaggeration possessing half so many redeemable qualities.

II.

THE world-famous Nepigon, or "river that is like snow," the largest tributary of Lake Superior, the greatest of fresh-water seas, is from its outlet at Red Rock, near the crossing of the Canadian Pacific Railway to its head at Virgin Falls, forty miles; and in that distance falls three hundred feet, though the river proper terminates at the northeast side of Lake Helen, making about thirty miles of actual river. Its course is due north and south. There are four so-called lakes, the first and largest one, Lake Helen, being perhaps seven miles long and in places two miles wide. Further north are Lakes Jessie, Maria and Emma, which are merely moderate widenings of the river, though properly dignified with the name of lakes.

On the east side of Lake Helen, a mile or



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two above Nepigon village, is a small Indian settlement with a few clearings, sparsely cultivated, savage gashes on the landscape and detracting somewhat from the original beauty of that part of the river; but north of Camp Alexandra the thread of civilization is quite slender, in fact, snapped asunder, and aside from the angler's camping places, there are few indications of man's encroachments.

Northbound, the first halt is usually made at Camp Alexandra, twelve miles above the outlet of Lake Helen and opposite the beginning of the long portage of two and a half miles on the west side. Camp Alexandra is on a prominent point at an abrupt curve of the river. The first rapids of any consequence are here, and one may catch trout of a pound or larger, though the finest fishing near this camp is a mile or more upstream at the foot of Cameron Rapids, which means an easy tramp with one slight climb of a few rods.

You have doubtless read Southey's poem, "The Cataract of Lodore," with its wealth of words descriptive of water in motion.

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Cameron Rapids would promptly have exhausted all those words and compelled Mr. Southey to search for others; and then, abandoning the almost fruitless task, he would have attempted inventing new ones; and finally, giving up in despair, would have said to those sons and daughters: "Go look for yourselves; you would never believe me."

The finest view, and one that many visitors overlook, is about seventy-five yards above the pool, where from a shelving rock one can enjoy an uninterrupted survey of nearly the whole length of the snow-white rapids, "silver, silver, a mile of silver, going on to the sea." There is an Ojibway legend, possibly originating with a hobgoblin, that in the long, long ago a trout forced a passage up that impetuous rush of water; but it is now conceded that it was an hydraulic error, or the shadow of a mackerel sky. A casual glance and momentary reflection would readily convince the most incredulous that, while even a crippled trout with a running start, would encounter little difficulty in coming down, any statement that

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a trout can swim against this long, powerful current would receive little or no credence. It is an insurmountable barrier fraught with danger. Though Mr. Broadtail is a highly finished swimmer, he has his stern limitations.

While perhaps Nepigon trout can accomplish the impossible, I would have to be an eye-witness, and then would not vouch for it; but would be charitable and considerate enough to believe it a mistake or partaking of the nature of an unaccountable accident or the malice of a desperately frightened fish that had taken his life in his hands and gone it blind; but as a traveled fishway northward, never! He is no mollycoddle nor sucking dove nor tenderfoot, but he would be shipwrecked before navigating three yards.

If one did attempt it, I'll warrant his companions and playmates kicked up their heels in glee and laughed until the tears streamed down their cheeks when their foolish brother came tumbling back, breathing hard and soaked to the skin, blushing and hanging his head in shame from his ineffectual efforts and

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misapplied energies. There would not have been a dry eye in the school.

At this magnificent pool, one of the beauty spots of the world, we adjust our tackle, and in earnest go a-fishing. The hour "when the air is laden with the indefinable odor of the warming earth," the hour so impatiently awaited, has arrived; and here we commence. On tiptoe for the first strike, we moisten the maiden-feather of the season, see our Parmacheene Belle make her *début*, and realize the dreams and hopes of many dull winter days and nights, when we looked longingly forward with almost interminable craving for this very moment; but with now a feeling of having again come into our own.

At last we are out o' doors, with the river and the rapids, the hills and the trees, and quite content with life, for here is something of the ecstasy of living, the joy of physical existence. Here at this haven of the blest we find the sovereign remedy, medicine, and good medicine, too, for that peculiar disease, spring fever; and there is nothing in the world now

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save the Nepigon, its trout and ourselves. It makes one feel as though his years were an illusion, as expectancy bubbles and the buoyancy of veritable youth reasserts itself. Verily it is good to be here, when the gladness of the days and the spirit of the woods take full possession. If a man is fortunate enough to have a commendable hobby, he is doubly fortunate if he can cultivate it out o' doors.

It is unnecessary to describe the preliminaries and requisites of the coming bout. To witness the frictionless action of the rod just assembled, one would hardly surmise it had been slumbering away the long winter days in an obscure corner, taking neither exercise nor nourishment, but with never a whisper of complaint. For at the first movement of the wrist and forearm, it fell into step and all its wonted suppleness was restored in a twinkling. The fountain of perpetual youth still bubbled in its joints. It gazed over familiar scenes, recognizing the old pool, where it had suffered in defeat and gloried in victory, and its good red fighting blood began coursing from

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tip to butt as it shouted, "Hold me tight, but turn me loose!"

The atmosphere above and below was decidedly fishy. The trout in a highly receptive mood, displaying an eager readiness, as trout sometimes do, when the proper attraction is tendered, and we landed a half dozen, none of them large for the Nepigon, but each discreetly chosen. It was a very gracious renewal of our acquaintance with a very gracious river. We were more than gratified with our modest catch; we were at peace with all the world, and there came a sense of thankfulness for the golden luck that had crowned the day. It had been generously kind, the fulfillment of hopes long cherished; and we never imposed upon it.

Delightful in every way as Camp Alexandra is, the river beckons us on, and we obey; for further up it grows more and more attractive, until we reach the culminating point at Virgin Falls, the head of the river and the paradise of the big trout.

III.

FROM Nepigon village to Camp Alexandra is entirely a canoe trip. On the opposite side of the river begins the long carry of two and a half miles. Here we have always found a pretty good Indian lying in wait with team and wagon to haul across our canoes, provisions and camp outfit. His charge is (or was before the war) four dollars, which may appear at first blush an exorbitant one; but figuring on both sides of the paper, pro and con, it is not unreasonable. The service is really worth it, and more; for saving valuable time he practically prolongs your vacation nearly a day. Everything goes at one shipment. Though fish with him is cheap, he needs the white man's dough to make his daily bread, and his figure four has another compensation—it obviates the necessity of our supplementing it with a tip.

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This, the longest portage on the river, terminates above Cameron Rapids at the foot of Lake Jessie, two and a half miles from the Narrows between that lake and Lake Maria, where there is a beautiful camping place. Above the Narrows for some distance the river is comparatively placid, having only a moderate current. We ventured a late afternoon call on our friends, finding none of the old folks at home, and putting back all the indiscreet youngsters that were not severely pricked.

Here, begging a thousand pardons for our assurance, let us suggest, if you have landed a fish and decide if he is not dangerously wounded to restore him to the river, handle him with womanly tenderness and wet hands, for then you are less likely to rupture the mucous coating which protects him from parasites and disease. And do not fling him back, but rather place him in the water gently as you would put the present high-priced eggs in a basket. Grant him every chance for complete recovery. If his gills are not lacerated,

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and the fly is carefully extracted, that same trout will call again—perhaps.

Though the days cannot be dull nor time drag, the Narrows will not detain you long, for there are still better things at Island Portage, seven miles further up, with one carry of 250 yards, which takes you around Split Rock. This is a massive block, strikingly picturesque, planted in the middle of the river, and creating on either side rapids not navigable northward for our small craft, but which with careful management may safely be run on the downward trip.

Island Portage is a small island, only sufficiently large for one comfortable camp, which imparts a pleasant sense of ownership, though it be only temporary. Here pitch tent for a few days, if the ground has not been pre-empted. There is on the east shore directly opposite the portage another and much larger camping ground, but not so convenient nor desirable; and still another will be found on the west side of the river, at the beginning of the mile and a half carry, called Pine Port-

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age. At the lower end of the island is an excellent landing between the two falls, and at the upper end a natural rock-bound harbor between the rapids large enough to accommodate all the canoes that are likely to muster there at any one time.

Tenting on Island Portage is one of the luxuries of out o' doors life. We are living directly above a roaring waterfall, whose sound we scarcely ever hear. Gently sloping to all points of the compass, a more beautiful habitation could hardly have been designed and made to order. It is a combination kitchen, restaurant, laundry and living room, with light, drainage and ventilation perfect, wood abundant, the boisterous water supply all that could be desired, and with an enormous open bath room. Altogether an ideally located camping ground—sanitary, secluded, yet accessible, with all those outward and visible evidences of comfort that induce a serene feeling of at-homeness.

Below the island, from the east bank of the river, or from the lower end at the foot of

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either falls, one can generally inveigle several lusty trout into taking permanent shore leave. It is almost a foregone conclusion with an accompanying *if*, but above the island, near the beginning of Pine Portage, is the veritable water of promises, of promises rarely unfulfilled, for seldom the trout there even so much as hesitate, but wade in without any introduction in a charmingly unconventional manner. Alive and kicking, they bid you welcome. It is no trouble for them to show goods. Sitting up and taking notice, they wag their tails as dogs do when glad to see you. Near either shore or in the middle of the river, three, four and five pounders are not uncommon, and your next meal is almost assured.

Suggest to your Indians that they place the bow of the canoe as close as possible to that black rock in midstream opposite the portage above the island. There is plenty of white water dashing around. Drop anchor there. You are not likely to wait long for developments, nor will the guides pour into your ears the threadbare romance of somebody's last

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year's catch, to console and encourage you, for you can speedily produce your own true story.

A man cannot, by taking thought, add a cubit, nor even an inch to his height; but what he cannot add quicker than thought to the dimensions of a trout would beggar description. On the Nepigon there is no occasion for exaggeration; these colossal monsters speak for themselves and leave you with a clear conscience (if you insist upon it and care for that sort of thing).

It is not altogether fly-fishing here. Indeed, at times it is largely bait, at other times both fly and bait. Late in the season fly-fishing reaches its perfection; and that most graceful and artistic style of angling is infinitely preferable to all other methods, gripping and holding more effectively. Still there are occasional days and places when its results are scarcely perceptible; and then sentiment or vanity or prejudice against the minnow ought not to prevail, and rarely does.

On smooth waters the bait, of whatever description, would have to be cast, requiring

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a stiffer rod; whereas on most parts of the Nepigon, one can use his fly-rod and a minnow or cock-a-doosh, it being unnecessary to cast; in fact, it would be almost impossible to get distance with light rod. Just drop the minnow in the rather swift current, checking it when enough line is out, then reeling or stripping in; and when the strike comes, a business opportunity is presented that demands immediate attention; and you will have fully as much sport as though the proposal was made by a Silver Doctor or a Montreal.

Pretty severe to make a maid-of-all-work out of your favorite fly-rod? Yes, indeed, but it is presumably yours, with a receipted bill attached; and having implicit confidence in its integrity, backbone and action, you never hesitate in submitting it to the severest test, though using it for both fly and bait is rarely—we almost said never—to be commended, and while adding materially to the spirit of the fight, it certainly makes the rod round-shouldered and causes it to tremble at every joint.

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In bait-fishing with light tackle, as careful handling is required as with the fly, and is attended with the same delightful uncertainty; and we haven't a superabundance of patience with those who decry the minnow and applaud the fly whether or no. Invariably, like the great majority of anglers, we accord preference to the fly, and can hardly imagine a hook wearing plebeian worms, though they be moist and corpulent, when feathers are fashionable and attractive; but immediately upon becoming convinced that they are not wanted, we have no hesitancy in substituting bait and being thankful that there is such a substitute.

If intent on outgeneraling reluctant fish, you must needs be catholic in your methods, and the greatest enjoyment lies in solving the problem. It puts one on his mettle, according more delight in the ultimate victory; and the true value of angling as a pastime may be appraised by the obstacles it overcomes. If one could accurately foretell the happenings on a trout stream, there would be missing many of its allurements.

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We have frequently observed that the most enthusiastic and opinionated fly-fishermen—those who consider themselves the genuine article in piscatorial sportsmanship, who preach thistledown, snowflakes, sunbeams and other trifles, will, when occasion warrants, throw sentiment and system to the breezes, forsake their idols, and resort to the crawfish, the old barnyard hackle, the minnow, or any other alternative with the intense zeal of the inveterate dyed-in-the-wool bait-fisherman.

His preach and his practice are oftentimes quite conflicting, but he will be deterred by no legitimate methods, provided results are attained; and horror of horrors, “tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon,” we once witnessed a devotee of fly-fishing take a strip of salt pork, attach a scarlet ribbon to it, and cast it upon the waters, whence after a few minutes it returned, its mission accomplished. Results such as having fresh fish for supper are of infinitely greater importance than implements—if we are not caught at it.

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It is a certainty that to place the minnow on the water and manipulate it properly requires all the adroitness, experience and circumspection the fly-fisherman employs in presenting his lures, and the same careful attention in bringing the fish to creel; and my own observation induces the belief that half of fly-fishing approximates very closely to bait-fishing, with the fly as bait; and as to my individual efforts along that line, I confess there is little question regarding it.

Be not bound by precedent or tradition when you go a-fishing; only play fair. It is a much threshed-out subject, with a lively chorus of contradictions and divergent opinions; and while as difficult of satisfactory solution as the mooted question of up-, down- or across-stream fishing, the several methods each and all have the merit of being "simply immense." It is frequently a matter of pretense, and often not the most insuperable proceeding for the fly-fisherman to overcome when the larder needs replenishing. Then he reveals an elastic conscience, according scant

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consideration to methods save that they be honest; and he does not pronounce the modest hard-working worm beneath contempt. He still retains a wholesome respect for that humble friend of his boyhood days, even though he spit upon it.

When the fly is impracticable, there need be no hesitancy in resorting to other lawful expedients. The sterling high-minded angler will not lose caste by so doing, and he owes as much to his prospective victim; for one can heartily agree with Nessmuk, "when a plump two-pound trout refuses a tinselled, feathered fraud, I am not the man to withhold from him something more edible"; and will accord him ample credit for understanding the cravings of his own stomach.

IV.

IN the shallows of a placid little bay above and close to Island Portage one can secure for bait-fishing the cock-a-doosh. Robert Roosevelt, in his book, "Superior Fishing," says of it, "There are several species of minnows captured, but the favorite is a peculiar shaped fish, having the euphonious title of cock-a-doosh. What the name signifies in French or Chippewa we could not ascertain, but the broad round face and silver tail reminded one of a pollywog, which, of all created things, it most resembled. He is a muscular little fellow, and not appearing to mind a hook through him, furnishes a lively and attractive bait."

Though his expression is not especially prepossessing, his conformation and cover design are a handsome piece of workmanship, re-

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markably beautiful in its simplicity. Like diamonds, the cock-a-doosh is plentiful enough, yet rare enough to be valuable, and to the trout a delicious, toothsome and compelling luxury. An extremely domestic fellow is he, a simple-minded creature, rarely seen abroad, enamored of his home surroundings, leading a very prosaic life, never appearing to be doing anything but idling his time under cobblestones, and conditioning himself for the approval of his friendly captors.

Our guides, understanding his habits and peculiarities, could generally with little trouble supply our modest requirements. We never fully understood nor appreciated the admirable qualities of that abominable relic of barbarism, the two-tined table fork, until we saw Andre spearing cock-a-doosh. He would attach the fork to a stick about a yard long and poke it under the cobblestones near shore. When he stirred up a cock-a-doosh, it would dart from its hiding place, stopping a moment in curious surprise at the unwonted disturbance, thus affording chance for a shot

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which was almost invariably a center. Half a dozen were plenty, as they are fast colors and tough as leather. Though they are tenacious of life and equipped to survive much wear and tear, we always killed them before impaling on the hook, for dead bait here is, with proper handling, as efficacious as live bait, and there are humane reasons.

At last the prow of the canoe is forinst the aforesaid rock, and Hesperus, who bringeth all good things, is probably cooperating; and that signifies success. Needless to wait for the ripples; they are always there; and amazing as it may appear, there are usually fish and fish and fish, and you can creel so many if selfishly disposed that you will hardly venture to look yourself in the face—though one must not count them before they are hatched.

Guiding the cock-a-doosh (it is one of his days) with an undulating motion of the rod until it touches the edge of the swirling eddy, it is instantly rewarded with a powerful strike, an unmistakable chug and a frenzied rush that

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inspires respect. Zip! they've embraced each other with swift unrestrained joy and sorrow, and the skirmish with unnecessary hullabaloo is on all along the line. It is difficult to declare which has taken the initiative, cock-a-doosh or broadtail. Quicker than the telling comes the calm excitement of doubt, hope and pleasure. Trout's fighting blood is aroused in the unappreciable fraction of a twinkling and thoroughly sprinkled with tabasco, for he comes with fire in his eyes, which proclaims he means business, and he does things aplenty in quick succession, and the provocation is serious enough in all conscience.

Great Scott! But he fights with an ardor befitting his class; fights just as a man fights when driven into a corner, knowing he must strike quick and hard or receive a drubbing and perhaps get it anyhow. There is nothing languid about him. He has led the strenuous life, learning to swim and earning his daily bread by the sweat of his brow, and the sweep of his tail among the whirling eddies and rapids and the hurly-burly of conflicting cur-

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rents that would knock the sluggish fish off his feet and drown him forever and forever. These schoolings and exercises have developed his muscles and confidence, and made him the fighter he is. All his surroundings have been conducive to vigor and activity.

The fine line cut an invisible crescent in the water, then sweeping tense and straight toward a great black boulder, the rod never in the slightest losing control nor allowing an inch of slack; and bending all its energies, worked relentlessly, watched and guarded against every maneuver of the trout, divining his well-planned schemes with the precision and harmony of a master clock, responding seemingly of its own volition to the erratic movements of the fish, though he kept them up to concert pitch.

A whimsical fellow indeed, now balking and treading water, then running away, and again just skittish and shying like an unbroken colt. Then comes a mighty tug, tug, tugging; but the hook is remorseless in its reckoning. Now begins a series of sharp,

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quick jerks, which always causes a few moments of suspense; and away he goes on the last spurt of his abortive fight. He is a very presentable fish, a thoroughbred from the tip of his fingers to the end of his toes, and endures a world of punishment before he succumbs; but even thoroughbreds reach the end of their ropes.

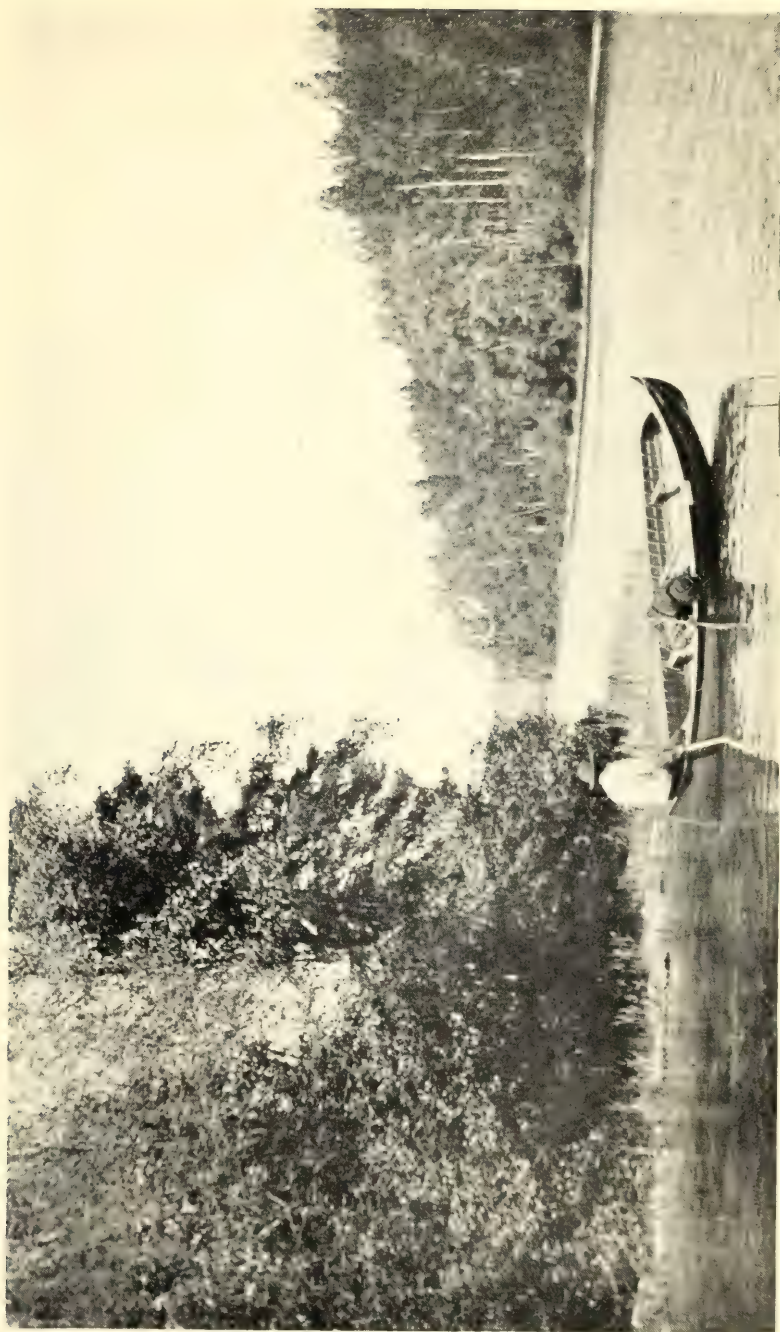
The tension finally relaxes, and the outcome, unless the phenomenal quickly intervenes, is no longer an alluring myth, but something far more material. Now you force him a little, for the battle is practically won. Inch by inch, foot by foot, he draws nearer with colors trailing in the dust, his resources exhausted, his head dropped upon his breast in hopeless resignation, for his gasoline is running low, the luster dimming from his eyes, and finally, though very reluctantly, he does the befitting thing, bids a voiceless farewell to the ripples and the rapids, his promise of a brilliant future nipped in the bud. Then at the psychologic moment the landing-net—
So-o-o.

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My eyes! What a beauty! Purple and gold and silver, resplendent as a tropical sunset. Weight? Tut, tut. These brawny fellows speak for themselves, though they be dead. They carry their own true tales. He was gratifyingly large, two feet long, built in proportion, and handsome as ever flickered a fin, believe me.

He was a stalwart, solid-meated, game; no liver-fed sluggard; no hothouse product, tame and insipid, that waited like a prize pig for his food to be brought to him; but an active sportsman, a warrior bold, that had conditioned himself by buffeting the riffs and currents and battling among the eddies for his morning meals, and now it seems almost a sin that so beautiful a creature should be sacrificed upon the altar of man's love of sport, though every element of that sport was honest and gentle and manly.

Storming the rapids or circling the shallows and ripples, he is truly one of the princes of swimming creatures, and you would know from the color and cut of his clothes and his



AFTER COCK-A-DOOSH.

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manner of wearing them that his breeding was royal, his pedigree unimpeachable—a finished gentleman from the bottom of the river up to its very surface.

During these proceedings the trout has been a stranger, one among thousands, awakening no sympathy, but the moment the landing-net envelops him, he assumes a different relationship. There are mutual looks of joyful recognition. You are old friends; and your kind heart moved to pity would smooth his pathway and his declining years. Your compassion taking the most practical and effective form, you administer a determined and fraternal crack of the neck, and life, with its glowing prospect and sufferings, is snuffed out. He is officially and otherwise dead.

With its beautiful location, excellent fishing and various other features contributing liberally to the angler's comfort and pleasure, Island Portage is very rarely considered more than a tarrying place on the route to other fishing grounds further up. Properly equipped, the angler could spend many days

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here, never experiencing a cheerless hour; but he hearkens to the enchanting story of the rushing water, telling of the brawny fellows it passed at Virgin Falls, Miners' Rapids, Canal Rapids and Camp Victoria; and though we be loath to leave, the call is so insistent and irresistible, there is nothing to do but break camp and away.

V.

THE beginning of the next carry of a mile and a half, called Pine Portage, is a short distance above the island on the west side. Sometimes there is a wagon waiting, at other times not, though that matters little to the guides. Packing is part of their day's work, and it is surprising to the tenderfoot with what ease and celerity they travel these portages with their heavy and cumbersome loads.

It is not unusual for them to carry over these portages loads of more than two hundred pounds; and once I timed an Indian guide, whom I accompanied over this mile and a half. He covered the distance in twenty-five minutes, never stopping, while I, weighed down with a couple of rods and a few light traps, came puffing and panting just inside the distance flag. His load was fully

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one hundred and fifty pounds, and had it consisted of fish, would have been computed by every rule of guessing to have weighed at least two hundred, which is not an exceptionally heavy tump-line load for short distances. It is simply a question of what has to be moved; and then with his burden properly balanced and standing higher than his head, away he goes, surefooted as a burro. The tump-line is safer and more practical than any other style of pack harness, for if anything unforeseen should happen to the packer's footing, a shake of the head will instantly release the load, thus affording a better chance of recovery.

Years ago the canoes here were almost entirely of birchbark, which harmonized in every respect with their environment, and were admirably adapted to their requirements and to the character and contour of the country, dovetailing with their natural surroundings and blending harmoniously into the land and water scape. They were appropriate and becoming, conforming so closely to the map

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of the woods that, like the sky and hills and river, they seemed a part of it, and were the æsthetic thing for the northern wilds, proper and becoming.

They were necessary when the Indian, the pioneer and voyageur, were living off the country, and there were thousands in the making, scattered throughout the forest, hanging on trees like Christmas gifts. The builder had only to select the one he fancied, and none save the choicest were taken. The roots of the young spruce furnished thread for sewing the birch sheets, cedar and spruce the ribs and flooring, tamarack the cross-bars, and there was pitch from the pine for covering seams and preventing leakage. A little juggling with knife and hatchet, a little twisting and turning, quite a simple matter for the expert, and lo, the poor Indian had fashioned a beautiful canoe, buoyant, symmetrical, graceful and somewhat resembling himself, with its high cheek bones and complexion.

Now the white man is making as good a canoe, and one more serviceable, of pine or

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poplar, and the Indian of the Nepigon at least recognizes and concedes its merits; and the picturesque birchbark, after playing well its part, is gradually disappearing.

All the artistic temperaments have had a crack at the birchbark. Artists have depicted its perfect lines and colors, poets have rhymed it and blanked it; but in this utilitarian age, the picture and the poem make way for the more practical. Though apparently incongruous, the new order now is a wooden boat and store clothes for the Indian, and his old canoe will disappear like the tomahawk, the moccasin, the bow and arrow, the scalp-lock and other primeval necessities and luxuries; but doubtless he will long retain his old-time skill with the paddle; and more power to his elbows.

Pine Portage carry is the last of any considerable length on the river. Flat Rock Portage, Miners' Rapids, Camp Victoria and several others are only a few yards long and welcome opportunities for leg stretching, and some of them are safely run on the downward trip.

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The river from Island Portage to Virgin Falls presents an ever-varying panorama. Never monotonous, replete with surprises of life and swift currents, it doubles, twists and somersaults, nosing in every direction even upstream, having all the erratic movements of the knight on a chess-board—north, south, east, west and intermediate points, each succeeding turn having its individual charms constantly presenting themselves to your delighted eye.

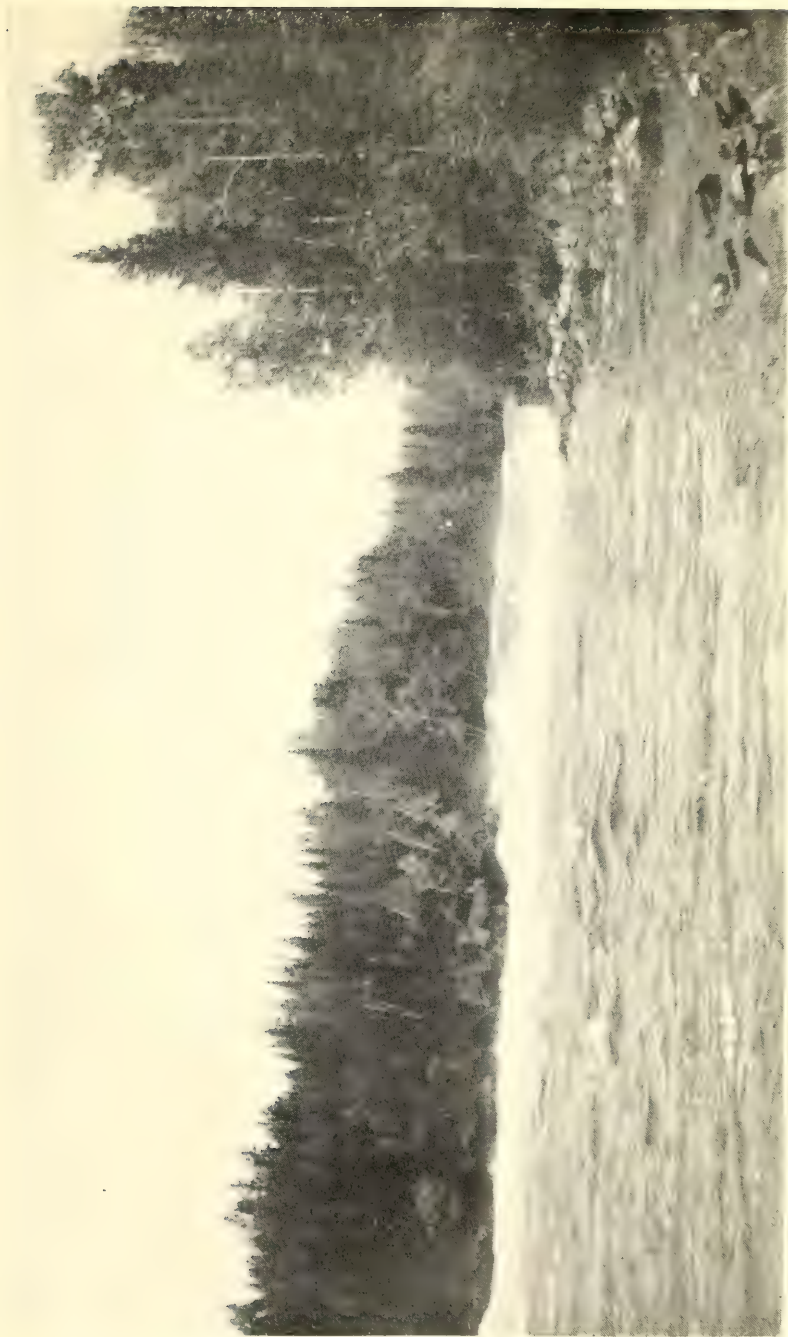
In places the shores are precipitous, though for the greater distance the banks ascend gradually, and are densely covered with pine, spruce, tamarack, poplar, white birch and scrub cedars, and indented with numerous bays. While not grand nor sublime, it is superbly beautiful, pleasant and companionable, liberal to a fault, and all unforgettable.

At Virgin Falls, the outlet of Lake Nepigon, the river springs into life with a very successful hop, skip and jump. The lake, lavish in her gifts to the river, has bestowed a goodly flow of water with which to embark

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in business; and through its active life of thirty miles to Lake Helen, the stream receives no great accession to its volume, Fraser River and the outlet of Lake Hannah being the only streams of moderate size emptying into the Nepigon, though there are others quite small and unimportant. Fraser River is in itself a very pretty stream, one-half to one and a half pound trout running up and affording abundant opportunities for dry and wet fly-fishing.

There are doubtless many bigger pools than those below Virgin Falls, but in all this world there are few places harboring such speckled trout as swim in those strong, boulder-smashed rapids; and little wonder they are large, for the shining minnows, which come traipsing about or huddled together in silvery shoals and treading on each other's feet, furnish nourishing food in generous quantities.



VIRGIN FALLS.

VI.

ADJOINING the camping grounds below the falls on the east side, just off the rapid current, is a favorite lurking place of the pike and the pike-perch. During most seasons they are plentiful enough, though the angler who procures a license for fishing the Nepigon squanders little time with them, for they are not worth the powder, and it would be like casting pearls before swine.

The pike is the prototype of the highwayman. He is lacking courage to invade the rapid, turbulent water, and seek honest employment there. His principal occupation is lying in ambush among the quiet reaches near shore and at opportune times levying merciless tribute on every unsuspecting victim that happens along. Among the useful, harmless minnows he is fierce as a dragon, though nat-

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urally a pusillanimous sneak, the embodiment of pure cussedness, a confidence man, always watching for something easy.

When he is hooked and feels the prick of the steel, there is only a momentary skirmish, a magnificent bluff, then sinking into a lethargy, "the critter's eyes are sot," he is ready to surrender, turn up his toes and cry enough, after offering less than a half-hearted scuffle—it is no fight; and being destitute of manners and self-respect, hobbles in on all fours, or sneaks in like a water-soaked stick.

He is absolutely resourceless, and anything that savors of concentrated and determined action to save his scalp is repugnant to his intestines. He has not one-quarter the game-ness of his neighbor, the sedate-looking white-fish. Just jerk him in without any compunction of conscience, for there is a total absence of genial expression while handling him, and the angler here, if so unfortunate as to hook one, invariably tosses him into the discard with alacrity and disgust.

Scales, feathers, fur, bristles, never cov-

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ered a more arrant coward. He may, like evil, have his mission in this world, but it is not the angler's province to classify it. He is a guilty wretch any intelligent jury would justifiably convict without hearing the evidence. He is omnivorous, and can be captured with almost any bait, dead or alive, scorning nothing unless it be the artificial fly; and while in a manner protected, it is by a law "more honored in the breach than in the observance."

The Indians net great quantities for dog meat. They net him, spear him, pitch-fork him, so he can make room for a better species. There are no recognized rules of warfare or of sport where the pike is involved, even the application of dynamite and rough-on-rats being advocated, and the sole objection to those agents is that the innocent might suffer with the guilty. That is my unbiased opinion of Mr. Pike of Nepigon, Ont., as a purely sporting proposition, and with no intention of discrediting his qualities in the fish market.

The pike-perch, another denizen of these

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waters, and more commonly known as the wall-eyed pike, possesses many characteristics of the pike, though being a great improvement on him and quite a king by comparison. He ought to be a cousin, a second cousin or at least a collateral relative, though properly belonging to the perch family. He also is rarely caught in the swish and roar of the white caps, much preferring the weeds; and having no commendable fighting qualities, he quickly displays the yellow streak and is easily landed.

He may be fairly palatable on the table when properly served and cautioned to be on his good behavior, but makes no special appeal to the sportsman angler, though apparently satisfying the requirements of the professor of the hand-over-hand line, the deadly gang-hook and other mechanical monstrosities and contraptions.

Near the west shore of the river, and a few rods below the falls, is a fashionable watering place, with promenade and feeding grounds, of the whitefish, where during the

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height of the season there are immense numbers, the water fairly perspiring with them. They are remarkably beautiful, with silvery sides, iridescent scales and pearly pink trimmings; and are very properly catalogued among the game fish, although their taking the fly or anything more substantial from a hook is purely accidental. If the whitefish would rise to those beautiful deceptions as readily as the bass or the trout, he would soon establish his standing as high in the angler's estimation as it already is in the appreciation of the epicure. That means the whitefish freshly caught.

His preference is for the rather placid water, though never hesitating to make occasional forays into the roughest rapids; for he is capable of managing and sailing his own craft in all weathers, if not interfered with. They require careful handling, owing to their small and tender mouths.

The first one we ever caught was near the foot of Virgin Falls. Hooking him was an unavoidable accident on our part, and one

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for which the fish was not entirely blameless, though he might have been prompted by some inconsiderate messmate, for he was never authorized nor constructed to swallow so large a fly. But while engaged in this little fracas, one would scarcely have mistrusted he was anything other than a speckled trout, and the most pugnacious of the species.

We could rarely entice them by the ordinary artificial fly strategy, so, following a suggestion of Dr. Morris, we equipped an eight-foot leader with half a dozen imitation caddis flies, No. 12 hook, and letting them drift with the current to where the genuine article was floating, could reasonably expect an unintentional strike. And then sport followed, for they are quite as game as trout of their weight, and dispatch business right off the reel. This style of angling, however, was only an experiment, and we did little of it; though they might afford sport aplenty were they the only fish. Broil him soon as possible after taking, and you will pronounce him most delicate, delicious and nourishing;

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snow-white, firm, flaky and hardly surpassed, if indeed equaled among fresh-water fish. Fresh from the water, the whitefish is *par excellence*; and right here in the home and haunt of the speckled trout, when I can have *Coregonus* on my little rustic table, *Salvelinus fontinalis* is treated with silent contempt.

The caddis flies register about the middle of July, and are assigned upper rooms. Our camp, not more than thirty feet from the river, they never visited; nor did they even return our calls; but keeping directly over the river course, formed an unbroken column its entire width and fifteen or twenty feet above; so that fishing from canoe or shore, we were never molested nor annoyed by them. Toward sundown their ephemeral lives are ended; and they fall into the water from whence they came. Then the whitefish, great shoals of them, with dorsal fins out of the water, begin feeding upon the teeming insects as if they had fasted for months.

As the flies float away with the current, they resemble great masses of seaweed, and by

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morning all traces of them have disappeared, only to be replaced by the myriads of the following hosts. A gentle, decent, well-mannered youngster, is the caddis fly, and judged by his past record and history, deserving of a few moments longer lease of life. If those winged pests, the punkies, mosquitoes and black flies, would pattern after his inoffensive example, life in the woods would be shorn of the one great feature bordering on hardship.



RAPIDS ABOVE VIRGIN FALLS.

VII.

ON many streams, angling, like medicine, is an exact science. Not on these rapids, however, where it is simply seeking the monsters and catching them fairly. If you are only intent on matching your wits and skill against the trout's natural wariness, don't visit the Nepigon. For the Nepigon trout is an unsophisticated countryman, who has never comprehended the significance of a slender fly-rod shadow falling across his lurking place. The tread of the angler on the bank, the dropping of an anchor or the flash of a paddle, conveys no warning. He never realizes until too late the difference between the genuine insect falling helpless on the water and the imitation offered him with deadly intent. He rushes headlong into dangers his better educated brothers of smoother and quieter streams would instantly detect and avoid.

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Those trout, exceedingly suspicious and easily frightened, from almost constant association during the open season with the experts of angling, have developed their wariness and circumspection to an almost incredible degree. They have grown to be such masters of foraging cunningness and resources that no counterfeit presentment will pass muster, unless the most artistic and convincing methods are employed. On those streams that instinctive wrist-movement setting the steel must be practically simultaneous with the rise. It is automatic. There is no time to reason, for the rush must be met, not presently, but instantly, almost anticipated.

The perfection of scientific angling, which is with the dry or floating fly, the deadliest of all styles on some waters, and the most graceful and fascinating anywhere, would certainly prove ineffectual on most parts of the Nepigon. We have witnessed here adepts at that style of angling, but they very reluctantly altered their plans. The most accomplished one of them all was a thorough Englishman, who

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gladly accepted a cast of rough-and-tumble wet flies. He very quickly perceived that his dry flies would have rendered a better account of themselves on smoother waters, for the dry fly on these rapids becomes a wet one directly it lands and ricochets once or twice. It is almost bait when a strike is actually made, and in that event the angling purist would almost rejoice to have the fish break away. Fancy! The large trout of the Nepigon are less disposed to come to the surface than are the smaller and more active ones; and after all, we each and every one relish landing the big fellows that are more likely to take the partially submerged fly.

I have never used the dry fly, the closest imitation of the natural one, and in its action on comparatively unruffled waters, the most lifelike; and, alas, circumstances over which I have no control will probably never permit my doing so, though firmly believing in its efficacy at times when managed by the expert. While assuming no pretensions to cleverness, having simply acquired mediocrity, I concede

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to no one more honest love of the sport, and have never witnessed any branch of outdoor recreation affording greater pleasure than to watch the finished artist place his flies so delicately and accurately that the trout regarded it as a compliment and considered it obligatory to rise, strike and repent.

It may be, as some of the old-fashioned anglers designate it, a fad; and while there is possibly additional adroitness connected with it, results often justify its use. After making all due allowance for the extravagant praise of its merits, we may be confident that it is destined to become, from the standpoint of scientific angling and, for its achievements, as popular here as with our English cousins. And still better, the dry-fly angler could hardly be a trout hog, even if he were so inclined.

Putting one's flies on the water like thistle-down or snowflakes is unessential here on the Nepigon. Nor is accuracy required on these ripples and rapids. You have simply to place your cast approximately to where wanted, for

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the currents and cross-currents will carry it with a little kindly advice to the desired place; and best results are obtained in these thoroughly aerated waters by slightly submerging your flies; but they will attend to that detail themselves.

Practically all the trout caught in the Nepigon during July and August, are from the rapids. This gives them a better fighting chance and adds zest to your sport. Here the ripples and the currents and rapids frequently make caution unnecessary; and sometimes if you are too respectful and polite, the trout may ignore you altogether. There are thousands of anglers, accomplished ones, too, who take pride in their sport, who will testify from experience that oftentimes the most effective way of catching trout is to wake 'em up. They believe in advertising. If honeyed words and delicate methods fail to arouse him, get him mad; it's worth trying; only keep cool yourself. The great art here is not casting the fly, nor the minnow, nor setting the hook, but rather in the battle that fol-

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lows; and this applies to nearly every point on the river.

Here the youngster with his switch and twine would never distinguish himself. We have often encountered this wonderful bare-footed youngster with one "gallus" and a letter in the post-office, who spits on his hook, being a staunch believer in that school-boy superstition that it induces good luck. Bless the little fellow; he knew where the trout hid. He was bright and right-minded, else would never have devoted much of his leisure to fishing. We are most of us that identical sunburnt, freckle-faced stripling, and can easily discount our earlier efforts. As good old Thad Norris says: "I confess as I write these lines with my spectacles on that I still have a strong drawing toward this type of boy, whether I meet him in my lonely rambles or whether he dwells only in my memory."

While the Nepigon is not a fisherman's paradise in the sense that the angler needs be a proficient in the art, even here with everything favorable, there must be a "feeling for

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the business that's kin' o' born in the fisher, but hoo that comes aboot I dinna ken." You have heard it said that every plant will grow and blossom and thrive for one who cares for it; so every pool and swirl and quiet reach offer their bounties of swimming beauties to him who is alert and careful and observing, to whom methodical nicety is a foster brother—sometimes.

Even here there must be no haphazard methods; for the most effective factor is attention to the minutest details; in other words, preparation properly prepared, which is akin to genius. He who complies with these directions is the gentleman who catches fish. Most of us are responsible for our own misfortunes, for opportunities often come and go when we are careless and wool-gathering.

One must have a Frenchman's eye for details, which perhaps seem unimportant, yet have charms and fascinations and meanings all their own; while the pleasant chat on the bank or in the boat, when one is changing flies that have failed to perform their mis-

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sion, the comparing of notes, swapping of yarns and inventing the most futile and absurd excuses for something or another—all these are interlined with the preliminaries and sequences connected with angling.



NEAR CAMP VICTORIA.

VIII.

THE stretch of river between Virgin Falls and Miners' Rapids to Canal Rapids, like many another length of the stream, is charmingly vagrant. More than that and perhaps worse, it is delightfully tipsy. It hurries and loiters, dawdles and whirls; it is quiet and boisterous, and with many a merry ripple rushes into whirlpools of disorder, and out into the sunshine, then staggers back into the shadows of great rocks and tall trees, babbling in a maelstrom of unrest, "springing over obstacles, frequently going astray, but always coming out right further along, in spite of everything"; and while perplexing cross-currents, backsets and rapids impede its progress, it manages, like a thing of life, to stutter th-th-th river is fu-fu-full of trout; they only need ca-ca-catching. Surely it classes with the

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notable trout streams of the world. It is radiant with promises, its whole length a cheerful ripple of invitation; and we are promptly busy with the important object of our outing, one rod at the foot of the falls, the other from the rocks near camp, an advantageous and unobstructed point for the fly thrower.

Supper must be caught, and after a few preliminary casts to straighten the leader, the fly went quivering fine but not too far. If there were any lurking suspicions regarding the integrity and genuineness of that feathered barb, there was enough curl on the water to allay any great mistrust of methods and implements. In a blasé, nonchalant sort of manner, with an exaggerated appearance of leisure and languid unconcern, with no intimation of malicious purpose, the fly swept and danced, apparently oblivious of broad-tail's whereabouts, seemingly indifferent whether or no he attracted attention, though all the time keeping his weather eye peeled and looking from the corner of it for any

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sign of recognition, and ready instanter to transact business at the first indication of interest.

He was really vitally concerned in what was occurring in his immediate neighborhood, understanding his duties, attentive to them, and bristling with suppressed activity. It was the perfection of feathery lure, not for an instant losing motion, and presently catching the proper swirl of the current, there was a savage rush and the gleam of a beauty, as away he darts with swimming colors. Never were fins and tail worked harder. He was a misguided desperado, a delirious devil when he found that Silver Doctor only a mockery, a delusion, a snare, and an epicurean fizzle. At the other end of the rod it was no fiction, but a glad, substantial reality, making the nerves tingle with an exhilarating and blithesome expectancy; for one is never quite certain what the victim will do next; and though the hook be firmly imbedded, anything is likely to happen.

His firm, thrilling strain demands more

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line, and the reel, the while crying for mercy, responds generously as the rush of water augments the trout's frightened dash for freedom. But you handle him carefully, giving him line here, pressing an advantage there, and keeping up a sort of electric communication, though he never sputters a word above a whisper, for he's not the fellow to whimper when stung. He simply fights, beating the current, dashing into the eddying rapids and submerging his forward decks, up, down and on the bias, shooting to the bank and returning with reverse English, running and skulking on the bottom, with dogged obstinacy, exhibiting everything in his repertoire, but, mildly confound him! never a jump. Aviation is almost unknown to him.

Finally, under the unrelenting spring of the rod, his rushes grow more and more restricted, the loud pedal is off, and he becomes quite indisposed, then dangerously ill, hovering between life and death, with scarcely a chance of recovery, for the struggle has become pitifully one-sided, and finally the gallant fellow,

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heaving a sigh of exhaustion, and gazing at his captor with mild resignation and one last convulsive flop, succumbs to your skill. He was a long time coming and the proper thing on arrival. The freckled fellow, after a gruelling contest, was fairly conquered by light rod, fine line and fly and plain rubber reel.

We have never taken kindly the suggestion to use the automatic reel for retrieving line. It is hardly fair to the trout, depriving him of the extra and deserved chance of escaping by the slack line route, which sooner or later he invariably seeks; and robbing the sterling angler of half his sport. Reel in by hand when breasting the rapids, he makes his dash toward you, and do not delegate the repulsing of that aggressive rush to any automatic crank, which, to accord the Devil his due, will accomplish all its advocates claim when one acquires the knack; and therein lies my greatest objection.

Carefully, carefully! Sh-sh-sh! Now the critical moment, first aid to the injured, the

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landing-net—and there is quite a sleight in handling it. Many a battle has been lost right here; for the trout, realizing he has made the mistake of his life, has reserved a little strength for the finishing touch. Many a victory has been thrown away by stupidity or carelessness or over-confidence at this all-important moment. If there is any period in the history of a fish when the angler, however high-minded and charitable he may be, craves everything in sight, it is right now, the present second. He has earned and deserves it.

Minimizing the danger of losing the trout, place the net well beneath the surface, and while you might miscue anyhow and topsyturvy all your calculations, your probability of landing him is vastly improved if the net is placed well down. Dig deep enough, so no hitch can occur, and the net result will be materially increased.

Oh, Piscator, by all the powers, admirably done. There he is, fresh as a bride, and beautiful in his speckled splendor, silver belly, pink fins, the yellow sides “bedraped with

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golden hail," all marvelously contrasted and shading off into the deep rich brown of the back, and gleaming like the rays of a prism. From stem to stern, from the basement to the ridge-pole of his anatomy "a thing of beauty and a joy forever," off or on. "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." But one cannot successfully paint the lily, nor gild refined gold. The stream from source to finish contained no finer; and the tackle, could it have spoken, would have confessed that it had been in a fight. Surely this is worth living for, you exclaim; and you can well believe "it is better to do the idlest thing in the world than to sit idle for half an hour."

Handle him with fellow feeling, for he has contributed to your pleasure, and it would be an act of reciprocity to contribute to his comfort and pleasure by rewarding him immediately he is landed with a consoling dislocation of the neck that instantly reconciles him to his fate. Don't forget the humane dislocation—that soothing deliverance from a cruel, lingering death. Keep him in the shade, free

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from dirt, and he will curl up and call you blessed, though I must confess that this benignant practice and feeling on both sides is woefully infrequent.

IX.

THE trout with his shrewdness and wily habits, his strength and gameness, lacks at least one special stratagem the bass often employs effectively. He apparently has little conception of the efficacy of a timely delivered blow, that dangerous and oftentimes damaging one, that has made many a black bass angler take the count, putting him temporarily out of business, the strike that comes like a flash of light, and which the bass sometimes succeeds in landing on a taut line, a blow beyond the knowledge of a speckled trout.

When the trout does land one, it is more in the nature of an accident pure and simple, and is easily guarded against, for he rarely makes that supreme effort to free himself from the restraining hook. But with the bass it is an entirely different proposition. He has

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inherited a seemingly exhaustless store of energy and unmatched resourcefulness, and while not familiar with the classics and higher mathematics, understands his business from the ground up.

He fights with a ferocity that asks and expects no quarter. He will come again and again, and unexpectedly, and one must lower the point of his rod most obsequiously and at the precise moment to avoid disaster. Very theatrical, full of bold expedients and undaunted courage, he can be depended upon to offer stubborn battle. But the trout's first jump is usually his last. He prefers fighting under cover. When he does come to the surface and fondly gazes at you, it is generally a confession of defeat.

When the acrobatic bass approaches with every spine bristling, it signifies fight, and he dies battling face to the foe. Not that the trout tamely submits at the first prick of the steel; far from it. He is a fighter, though not a scientific one, having no appreciation of the finer and more artistic points of the game.

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He looks the fighter, having the neck and shoulders of the pugilist, but is rather too beautiful, which, however, does not always follow, and there is lacking a little of the Irish in his composition, though when put to the crowning test, he hangs on with bulldog tenacity, lacking only the resourcefulness of the small-mouth black bass, the generally recognized champion of finny warriors, and of whom I can well believe that, inch for inch and pound for pound, he is the gamest fish that swims. He takes the fly readily; and then watch out, for he performs aplenty, has a genius for battle fairly dazzling, and will test your skill and tackle to the uttermost; for every moment he is fighting with a courage that is unshakable.

The bass has no elaborately planned program, and does not fight in accordance with recognized rules. He makes his own rules and regulations, applying them as conditions arise; and not even momentarily can you relax vigilance, else woe betide you; for he is master of every curve, drop and up-shoot, and needs

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no coaching. He loves a feast or a fight, and is never conquered until his neck is broken. He does not feed as much on the surface, and fly-fishing for him is to some extent more difficult, as the hooks must be submerged a little, and that, in connection with the bony construction of his mouth, makes setting the steel more uncertain.

He may be deceived for an instant by adroitly placed hook and feathers, but after that understands his business, runs true to form; loves to surprise you, and fritters away no precious moments, for there is not a lazy hair in his head. He is the quintessence of fight, the personification of pluck, and for altitude and fight is in a class by himself, with movements copyrighted, and playing the game at every stage for all it is worth.

Perhaps one exception should be made, for from what I have read and been told, the ouananiche is quite as powerful a fighter and possesses higher acrobatic skill. Unfortunately I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance; don't know him by sight, have never even

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dropped him a line. Occasionally I have had trout jump when the hook touched some exceedingly sensitive place, though strongly suspecting I was materially abetting and encouraging the fish in so doing by assisting him toward the surface; but I have never noticed that it was a record-breaking performance, and could never persuade myself that I was not an accessory to the crime. But I love to catch him, and have for lo, these sixty years or thereabouts, and still retain my boyish enthusiasm for his taking.

The hooked trout rarely jumps. The bass will do so repeatedly; though our imperfectly regulated guess machinery stretches a twelve-inch leap to two or three feet. Two feet is exceedingly rare. Possibly I have seen a bass jump so high, but I can submit no verifying documents. Fishing one afternoon above Island Portage, and having landed a couple of trout, I hooked a third one, and concluding to make him come up into daylight, inspect the scenery and become acquainted, forced the fight, hurrying him along,

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and when he was a few feet from the canoe, I lifting on him as much as the tackle would sustain, he made his leap. André, the canoeman, surprised at the unwonted proceeding, muttered a very emphatic "Ugh!" imagining a few drops of water were spilled over his face.

A bass under like circumstances would have been in the air repeatedly, perhaps floundered into the canoe, carrying hostilities into the enemy's camp, and guaranteeing more thrills to the minute than all the trout in the Nepigon, thrilling as they are. His reputation as a fighter is firmly established, and there will be little criticism of his performances by the angler who has caught both bass and trout. With fair and proper tackle, the trout may be depended upon to accommodate you with a lively battle, yet he had better take several thinks and gurgle his prayers before joining issue with the small-mouth black bass.

X.

THERE is one great charm connected with trouting which cannot be enjoyed on the Nepigon. The river is not a wadable stream; it is hopelessly hazardous to the man on foot or on horseback. There is an exceptionable fascination in wading a trout stream when this is practicable and reasonably safe, for it affords a better and more intimate acquaintance with its peculiarities and conditions, a more thorough knowledge of the water than one has when fishing from canoe or shore. One gets closer to it, thoroughly irrigated with it; and moreover in wading one can go alone if he prefers, and no man feels less alone than when angling; for then none can dispute the littleness of the monster that broke away, nor the dimensions of the fingerling that escaped by smashing the tip of the rod.

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Danger has charms for youth, though oft times the youngster hastens into peril in a spirit of bravado. Caution with him is purely imaginary. But when a fellow is well down the western slope, commencing to frost about the temples, and dreads the sensation of cold water tickling his toes, he had better have a canoe, or fish from the bank and hang on; for when a man attempts wading here, he is taking a post-graduate course in indiscretion and will pass his examinations A+, for there are submerged rocks that would most assuredly cause saint or sinner to stumble and stay stumbled. They are no respecter of persons.

Fortune favoring, we were not long in catching supper and breakfast, and a toothsome pair for the game wardens, who made their appearance to visé licenses soon after camp was put in order. The wardens are not supposed to do any angling; in fact, we never saw them doing any, but they most assuredly carry trout appetites, and a speckled or two are welcome with an appetizer as a counter-irritant. Night was drawing near

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when our chef sounded the alarm for supper, about the time the setting sun takes the count.

We regretted the departure of the genial old gentleman. He had proven himself amiable and friendly; but had other engagements made long previous to our arrival; and the assurance that we were reasonably certain of his returning in a few hours, for it was the season when there was scarcely more than a passing shadow between evening and morning, reconciled us to bidding him "good night."

This going a-fishing is something of a habit, and a very commendable one besides; and though charged with a speculative flavor almost as fascinating as the absolute certainty, it is a very profitable idleness, even if it produces no material results. A great part of its pleasure and enjoyment is hopefulness. There is almost as much sport going a-fishing as there is in the fishing itself, and frequently more. It is under the most favorable conditions a matter of expectancy, and if there are any well defined rules relating to it, they are often difficult of application, for there

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are days when one is almost constantly essaying possibilities. Upstream or down, early or late, fly or bait, it is a speculation whether you win or lose, and heaven only knows; for oftentimes the glowing anticipations of the morning are blasted hopes in the evening. But one need never be discouraged, for it is not a permanent affliction.

The sport teems with ifs and buts and interrogation points and exclamation marks, sometimes heavy dashes and full stops. You cannot tell what a day will bring forth, and learning is part of the game.

Good luck is a coming event that casts no shadow before; so possess thy soul in patience. We hardly dare say one needs patience. What is better is contentment; and anyone privileged to go a-fishing ought to be content, though he only sees the water flowing by.

It is not wholly the game that attracts. There is that stimulating uncertainty, when all signs betoken rare sport, and though you return some evening hungry, sunburnt, leg-weary and fly-bitten, vowing you will never

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again be so feeble-minded, after you have had supper and a smoke, blown out the lights and retired, hope is still burning. That is never entirely extinguished. Quite undaunted, you seek the river again in the morning with superlative enthusiasm, hope and spirits lark high, ready and anxious, with undiminished eagerness. For there is sport going after fish that understand keeping out of harm's way, and you prove that once an angler is always an angler beyond reformation. Even though momentarily on the fence, you invariably jump to the right side. The angler thoroughly believes in the potency of the old formula: Apply a little of the hair of the dog that bit you.

In many years of angling experience, during all months of the open season, we have rarely found days barren of results. But, blessed be, we have encountered times when neither science, magic nor prayers availed; when we gazed into the depths and waited with supreme patience for the glorious strike or even faintest nibble; when we vouchsafed to

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these creatures of moods and phases our most persuasive smiles and favors, proffering a profusion of choices, nearly everything in the Fishkill directory, but they proved adamant to all our presentations, indifferent alike to the blandishments and the terrors of the hackle and the cock-a-doosh. All our well devised schemes for their entertainment and enlightenment went askew, and we might better have been chasing the mythical pot of gold at the rainbow's end. It is a burning shame what opportunities they sometimes overlook.

On the river is the ripple of invitation, the front door wide open, everything appearing so comfortable and homelike, one could hardly imagine more favorable conditions or a heartier welcome. The outlook is ideal, yet many of the laws governing trout are inexplicable. They may rise to-day under conditions that would create rebellion to-morrow. There is no sure precedent. From the angler's viewpoint, there is neither rhyme nor reason in their whims and crotchets.

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Now and then the river seems out of tune, and that delightful sense of expectation becomes water-logged, then a hopeless case. The fish in a non-receptive mood, following their sometime wayward fashion, decline all your offerings, "plucking from the nettle danger the flower safety" by refusing to rise. For even the Nepigon trout, though within striking distance, can on occasion prove an unimpeachable alibi. Their vagaries are perplexing and uncertain, if not unreasonable and past understanding. However, when not biting here, they may be rising and taking hold somewhere else; and some worthy brother angler is wearing smiles; and we will at least be partially satisfied on his account to accept the shadow for the substance, the distant splash for the actual rise.

Good luck is a transient guest, and if some particles of ill-fortune have been sprinkled over the afternoon, why, man, consider the score of other things lending their aid to augment your pleasure. You heard the song of the singing river. You saw that devastat-

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ing poacher, the blue-heron, haunting the shallows and waiting with unwearied patience to strike some unsuspecting victim. You watched the snowy gulls diving for minnows or circling above with untiring grace; the brilliant plumaged kingfisher with nervous energy patrolling the further shore. And perhaps you watched the sunlight and shadows playing their little game of hide and seek.

You felt the exhilaration in the magic of the forest air; your nose was blistered; your two big toes, and little ones, too, were tickled when you soaked the rest of your feet; and what an appetite you developed—so ravenously hungry and dead tired, but with the weariness that begets sound sleep. All these blessings, to which the real angler is never indifferent, yield ample compensation for dearth of rises—provided they are not played too often.

Even though you fail to realize it, your measure of enjoyment is bountiful and running over. To be supremely satisfactory, an outing of this kind needs a little diversifying,

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by what is mistakenly called bad luck. When you go a-fishing, accept what happens without fretting or brooding, for it rarely involves anything more serious than a good wholesome tire. Many of the pleasantest days on a trout stream have been those when little or nothing was caught. For, as has been said a thousand times, it is not all of fishing to catch fish. The true angler finds much of his enjoyment in all the surroundings, quite as much as in the fish itself, or even in its capture.

XI.

THERE is likewise another feature that will test the angler's natural temperament to the utmost; and that is when a trout in the twinkling of an eye, with the swiftness of a comet, breaks away beyond possibility of explanation, taking matters in his own hands with a determination to have his own precious way; when you have him in the abstract for a few minutes, only to lose him in the concrete indefinitely. Nothing is left but a frayed leader and the memory of a flash; but he only escaped and silently stole away. He only escaped, mind you, for as Piscator remarks, "The trout is not lost; for pray take notice no man can lose what he never had." Though it must be said that letting such a fellow break away (and he might have been a little one) is an annoyance that with some assumes the proportions of a catastrophe.

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Circumstances would fully warrant one, when realizing that his embroidered vocabulary is hopelessly inadequate, in rubbing his eyes and saying, "Good riddance." Or in compromising with the astounding expression, "Hang it!" and letting that suffice; though the appropriate word might be the unspoken one. But whatever is affirmed, grieve not over the irreparable, especially when it can be repaired; for sometimes that can be done unexpectedly while you wait. For a trout has been known to take a fly when the one of which the angler had been robbed is hanging from its mouth. That's when you arrest him with the goods.

We caught one above Island Portage with a fly in his jaw and dragging two feet of leader, which had been taken less than half an hour before. Of course, he was not severely pricked, the hook being imbedded in the cartilaginous part of the mouth, and the rugged fellow never minded a trifle like that. But an escaping trout, stung in a more sensitive part, will sulk in his tent; or, retiring for

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meditation and prayer, will ponder long before venturing on another foraging expedition.

"Blessings brighten as they take their flight," and from the speed displayed, these trout are well lubricated and highly polished. But don't let that keep you awake o'night. That runaway fish will do for a reminiscence, a cheery memory that may brighten a dull day when they forget to rise. But, alas and alack, or glory be! they are undoubtedly the greatest monsters that ever escaped the meshes of the landing-net. That's the weight of every breakaway, and it increases with the lapse of time. Charles Dudley Warner says, "Fish always lose by being got in and weighed. It's best to weigh them in the water. The only really large one I ever caught got away with my hook when I first struck him. He weighed ten pounds."

Every angler should be able to tie his own flies and make his leaders, though he is not assured of greater returns on that account, possibly fewer. There may be an unpleasant day when you don't care to fish; then a few

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feathers, some silk and worsted will help break the monotony of bridge and pinochle and cheerless weather. If one is interested and intent on learning, he can find an instructor willing to teach him. If he be an apt scholar, the rudiments are easily mastered. Sixty minutes of instructions for the leaders, and four or five lessons for the fly will suffice, though possibly one will have to revise his studies, and it is an interesting diversion, a recreation pleasant for the amateur.

Although the technique is extremely simple, your first creations naturally will not be the ultimate word in flies, nor have the beauty, symmetry and finish given by the professional tyer. But if you "try to put in practice what you already know, you will in time discover the hidden things you now inquire about"; and then your flies will be pictures and beautiful ones, little matter what the subject. After becoming fairly proficient, your production ought to prove in strength, wearing qualities and efficiency superior to most of those you purchase.

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Furthermore, there is opportunity of displaying original ideas as to color and form; for, while the present varieties seem almost countless, many other combinations may be put together, though the number of standard patterns actually necessary is comparatively small. Frequently it signifies little, especially as regards the wet fly, that the creation shall bear much resemblance to anything in nature. That it be artistically presented and manipulated when submitted to the crowning test is of infinitely greater importance.

Besides this, there is a world of satisfaction if one can make his own rods; but that is asking almost too much, for rod-making is a trade, and a good one. To become proficient, a long apprenticeship is needful. One ought, however, to be capable of making necessary repairs, though they be only temporary. Threads, glue, a jack-knife, a moderately well developed thumbnail, properly manicured, more for business than for appearance, are handy in a family away from home, if you are fairly proficient in their uses. This

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knack and knowledge are essential, and in hundreds of instances have saved a trip on the river from going to rack and ruin.

By persistent practice, you can attain expertness in fly-tying, just as the art of digging post-holes, the complex problem of hooking up your wife's shirt-waist, or even playing the violin and other accomplishments are acquired and mastered. But the general rule and best plan is to have your fly-book judiciously loaded, and not to lose valuable moments tying flies when you ought to be casting them, and tackle shops are not found at every turn of the stream.

XII.

WE repaired a fly, practically tying a new one, and it was certainly a nondescript evolved out of our inner consciousness, with no definite design, no basic principle, simply old flannels and feathers lashed together in boldest defiance of entomology, utterly regardless of the eternal fitness of things. But it was an inspiration, bearing no likeness to anything in the heavens above or in the earth below or in the waters under the earth, unless it may have been the raggedest and most disreputable looking tramp that ever tapped at the kitchen door.

Its object, tramp like, was to get something to eat with as little effort as possible; so we were justified in baptizing it with special solemnity the Hobo, and it was a hobo in all its pristine impurities and imperfections, even

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to its hackled whiskers, yet after its manner,

“The glass of fashion and the mold of form.”

It was a product of artistic appreciation and creative genius, a symphony in tatters, and the limit. It had seen better days, having been originally a Silver Doctor. Later frequent scrapping and love of the drink had incapacitated it for further successful practice, and now, with patching and original renewing, it triumphantly fulfilled its later mission.

It seemed preposterous to expect that anything partaking of the tramp temperament could accomplish good results, especially when clean water was an all-important factor. But our confidence was justified, for the trout, acknowledged authority on those matters, so pronounced. Recognizing and rewarding its audacity and persuasive powers, they approached that representative Hobo with insulting familiarity and hungry ferocity, and straightway paid the penalty. Its strangeness aroused a fatal curiosity, for the whole pro-

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ceeding was totally at variance with all recognized characteristics of the careful angler. But to those foolish trout it seemed the embodiment of succulency; they had evidently lost their boasted intelligence, and the bedraggled Hobo hypnotized them with his counterfeit saintly smile. His message was, "Hand out a bite"; they gave it, and ended their careers by sizzling on a broiler.

The Hobo had been well fed, clothed and doctored, his constitution thoroughly repaired; and one afternoon when he was strutting around camp, feeling fine as silk and quite cocky, we concluded he was seeking trouble, so we ferried him across the river, where he found it in abundance. He had overcome his repugnance to water, and from a rude platform below the falls made his plunge into the rapids. He carried a chip on his shoulder, and was soon busy. Full of confidence and with an utter disregard of the ultimate consequences, he provoked a quarrel with what proved a laker considerably larger than himself.



NEAR ISLAND PORTAGE.

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"You're on," said the laker. "Likewise you," replied the Hobo, as he judiciously inserted himself. There was no feinting, no flirting, no prolonged argument, for they locked horns instantly, buckling down to business, and went at it fin, feather and flannel. This, of course, drew the Hobo's master, who couldn't honorably resign under fire, into the fight. That laker gave more battle than any speckled we ever encountered. Acting not only on the defensive, he was an aggressor as well, side-stepping, advancing, retreating, always looking for an opening, never suffering the grass to grow under his feet, even though his whiskers were caught, and every moment doing his inadequate best or worst.

Though all the subtle artifices at his command were practiced, none sufficed to free him from the Hobo's clutches; but, Allah be praised! all the details, the minutiae and the appliances had been properly assembled and were perfectly managed. It was a momentous problem confronting the Hobo, but he understood his business thoroughly, and

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hung on with the tenacity of a bull-terrier. While the issue was ever in doubt, there was supreme confidence in the outcome, for we believed the laker was securely hooked, as the first touch of him was a solid one.

Meanwhile the laker came and went with energetic swishes simply amazing, displaying a ferocity which would have commended him to the favorable consideration of a bluefish, and would have prompted that salt-water pirate to grasp his fin and say, "Well done, brother—shake!" Several features played conspicuous parts in the final results. Good fortune, the established order of things, and a careful handling of tackle, which was subjected to a test well up to its limit, fortunately not beyond, for as somebody says, "If you cannot be clever, be careful."

There was no bustle, no confusion, consequently no mistakes. Patiently humoring him, affairs finally came to a focus, when for the fourth time he headed toward shallow water, perceptibly weakening and floundering to his finish; and the intensity of calm excitement

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was over as the fatal net enveloped him. Had it been otherwise, I verily believe I would have lost my gentle voice. Honor bright, he weighed twelve pounds or less, and a speckled of like weight would never have rendered a better account of himself. He was not a large laker, but sizable for light rod and line.

I confess to a momentary sensation of disappointment at his classification, having calculated while the battle was raging upon a patriarchal speckled, a venerable mossback, with untrimmed beard and neck furrowed with wrinkles, and an avoirdupois that would measure well up to or surpass authenticated records, the major domo of the river. But this slight chagrin quickly vanished in rapturous admiration of the splendid fight the vanquished warrior had given. Though the temptation to break away had been great, he behaved admirably, and I would have felt greatly indebted to anything, even a wall-eyed pike, that could have furnished so exhilarating a bit of sport.

A worthy adversary, all wool and a yard

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wide, and guaranteed not to shrink in the telling; and now complacently smiling, but not gloating over your discomfort, I doff my hat; for you were a beauty by and large and as catchable a fish as ever happened. Already, little fellow, I commiserate with you, for the appetited Indians are awaiting you. As for Hobo, he was no longer clothed in rags and tatters. They had disappeared, and nothing remained save the bones his parents would never have recognized. He had paid the penalty of his quarrelsome disposition. Despite our backing him up, so far as the man behind the reel was concerned, he was down and out forever.

XIII.

IF there is one commendable feature more pronounced than any other on the Nepigon, it is the complete banishment of the trout-hog. Some years ago this was a favorite resort of those fishing-for-count pirates. They flourished here, never slackening nor faltering in their miserable work, until the Canadian authorities, aroused to the gravity of the situation, and taking thought of the morrow, suppressed the evil; and now the trout are plentiful and large as ever.

A thoroughly efficient and alert force of game wardens see that the laws are enforced relating to the number and weight of your catch, and the way they are caught. Early and late they are on the lookout, yet liberal in their interpretation of the law, only demanding that the trout be taken fairly, and

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that nothing be wasted. The river is well patrolled by these officers, who inspect licenses at Camp Alexandra, Island Portage, Virgin Falls and other points. A liar might locate here and practice his profession without interruption, but that monstrosity, the trout-hog, would be taught a lesson without ceremony.

It is a gratuitous insult to the highly respectable and prolific friend of the farmer to interlink his name with a pot-fisherman, whose motto is destruction and extinction. The porker is entitled to ample apology, for he is a gentleman by comparison. He knows when he has enough; but the trout-hog never does, and often glories in his excess, even before the camera. He is thinly veneered with the love of angling; the ethics of fair play are to him a sealed book.

The Lord hates some species of quitters, but surely has great love for the pious angler who reels up when he has enough, and never begrudges liberty to the fingerling, believing in a modern rendering of an old saying—"a

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fingerling trout in the brook is worth two in the basket." A prodigious catch does not make an angler; nor is it "How many did you catch?" but, "How?" So quit when you have enough, even though the fish are still taking the fly, and verily you shall have your reward; and "blessed shall be thy basket and thy store."

The honest, conscientious angler is in one respect the antithesis of himself, in perfect accord with and faithfully observing all the wise provisions of law relating to the better conservation of game, yet untiring and unrelenting in its lawful pursuit up to his just requirements. He believes that the essence of good angling is not to catch too many. In all his actions he is consistently humane, and despite his keen desire to conquer, never fishes for count. He abhors that competition on a trout stream which proves nothing beyond the already established fact that one person may have more and longer bristles than another.

It is little wonder that the trout in many

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streams are fast disappearing. They have enough natural enemies, the crane, the heron, their own immediate family, all persistent and industrious, and the mink, who does his deadliest work when the streams are frozen. There is no close season for him. But nature had kept the balance fairly adjusted until the trout-hog began his work of extermination, in season and out of season.

On the Nepigon there is little of the so-called roughing it. A fishing trip here is in every respect an old man's tranquil outing, with nothing to worry or oppress, and with season tickets and stop-over privileges allowed. One does not find it necessary to economize in amount of luggage. Make your kit as elaborate as you please. Anything you consider essential to comfort being so easily transported, you need discard no article that may possibly be serviceable—one is not restricted by pounds or bulk.

Here one's pathway is strewn with roses, figuratively, and literally. There is not an hour's roughing in a month's outing. A very

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respectable minority of those who come here enjoy more comfort and luxuries than they have under their own vine and fig tree; for some of the camping luxuries are prohibited at home, are they not? Personally, I decline to answer.

We have had our full complement of roughing it in younger days; and now the Nepigon trip, with its proper boats, competent guides and regular meals, pleasant camping places, easy trails and carries, and all the modern improvements, is the perfection of outdoor life. Shaky-legs and bald-heads may enjoy it to the fullest and never turn a hair.

There is no place where the angler's comfort is more consistently attended to. We invariably noticed that the previous occupants of the several camps left them in immaculate order. All the débris that naturally accumulates is gathered and burned. The fires are extinguished, and every precaution is taken against their spreading. Tent pins and poles are carefully put aside; and everything is

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beautifully groomed clean and tidy for the next comers. The authorities require this. Still better, there is an unwritten law among the Indians themselves, to which they accord strict observance.

XIV.

THE earth had completed another regular revolution, and the dear old morning sun, without a blemish, looking remarkably vigorous and hardly its years, appeared about the prescribed time, possibly a little later than yesterday, which, however, made no material difference in the day's program, as altogether the instructions in the almanac had been fairly well complied with. We could register no reasonable complaint, for the schedule is subject to change without notice.

All the accessories essential to a moderately successful sunrise were present or accounted for, and while some special eastern or southern features were missing, their participation on this occasion would have been an innovation and a bad precedent. The stars had already stolen away, leaving the lonely

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old moon looking a trifle pale, as though she had passed an uncomfortable night, and now lingering single-handed to catch a glimpse of the coming day, though she should have known it was going to damage her business in this section.

The wilderness was certainly wide awake and infinitely joyous. A bonny morning, indeed, with no mischief except intruding on peaceful slumbers, one of the general rule mornings lying loose on all the shores of the Nepigon. The river itself seemed in a friendly mood and full of glorious presagement. We heard the sound of tumbling waters, radiant with promise and speaking of trout galore. There was no doubting the signs. Later in the day we might be wiser. The air was full of subtle fragrance, as soothing as an anodyne; and we knew it would be pleasant from reveille to taps.

These beautiful mornings of unclouded splendor, well ordered and in place, came along with unvarying regularity, and while there were variations in color and tempera-

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ture, we delighted in all, and flourished to the fullest extent, until ready for home—which is a good place, despite the answer of the old gallant who had courted a lady for years, and on being questioned why he did not marry her, replied, “If I were to marry her where would I spend my evenings?”

Time is up, licenses expired. The Silver Doctor abandons his lucrative practice; the Grizzly King abdicates; the Parmacheene Belle is en déshabillé. The canoes are loaded, and now, with wind and current favorable, we weigh anchor.

Many of the rapids around which we carried, roped or poled up can be safely run on the downward trip. They are not dangerous to one familiar with their peculiar cross-currents and backsets, though to the stranger they spell disaster. To the Indian a rapid which he has seen the second time is simply one which he knows how to navigate. The smooth, swift glide of the homeward-bound canoe is exhilarating and full of sheer delight, but not especially thrilling.

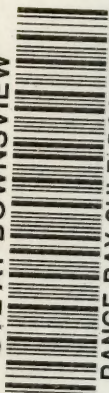
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And now, at this distance of miles and years, I often hear the devil-may-care rhythm of the river, its songs and choruses and its roar, the cheerful ripple of welcome and assurance, the lulling sound of the distant falls, the swish of the wind, the mellow notes of the white-throated sparrow, the tapping of the crested woodpecker. I close my eyes and yet see clear and vivid the emerald sweep of pine and hemlock, "the slender whiteness of the silver birches shimmering through them," the marvelous pageantry of the shifting clouds, the flaming Northern Lights, and loving their phases and moods, I feel the rhythm and surge of it all.

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